

Repetition in Writing

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Almost everyone faces a variety of writing tasks whether in school or on the job. People have to write reports, lectures, speeches, papers, case studies, examinations, directions, summaries, job application letters and a host of other assignments. In fact, there is not a field of professional or business life in the world today that does not demand the ability to write well. Yet, the fact should be faced squarely that good writing is and has always been extremely rare. By good writing I mean just the simple, clear kind that everyone always demands from others. The truth is that simple, clear English is no one's mother tongue. It has to be worked for.

Good writing is, therefore, judged on one standard only: Does it communicate to the reader? It is because writing is the act of transmitting thoughts, feelings and ideas from up here in the head to down there on paper. To be effective, a piece of writing must be well organized, logically conceived and clearly expressed. A good writer knows how to use language to appeal both to the senses and to the intellect. Well-chosen words stimulate, communicate and clarify; poorly-chosen words can bore and confuse the reader. Most writers choose language which, they hope, will affect their readers' emotions and thus convince them of a truth or persuade them to accept an opinion. When building up this kind of rhetorical appeal, a writer may use several devices. One of the major devices is intentional repetition or repetition for short, which involves the repeated use of key words or phrases.

A speaker may pound the rostrum to emphasize an important point. A copywriter may underline a word in an advertisement to emphasize its importance. And the most natural way to emphasize your wants is to keep repeating them; similarly, in your writing, you can emphasize ideas and facts by repeating key words and phrases. Through the repetition of the same words and phrases, you make sure that your ideas are clearly understood. For example, you might give the following explanation for getting home late:

On the way home, I had to stop at the food store, the post office, and the bank.
By repeating the preposition *at*, you can state the same sentence more forcefully:

On the way home, I had to stop *at* the food store, *at* the office, and *at* the bank.
Yet another option, for even greater force, would be the following:

On the way home, *I had to stop at* the food store, *I had to stop at the post office*, and *I had to stop at* the bank.

For the past century or more, the use of repetition as a stylistic device for pur-

poses of emphasis, focus or thematic arrangement has been gaining ground both in colloquial style and in political, literary and poetic writing. The following are the chief forms of repetition:

I. Single-Item Repetition

By single-item repetition only one key word or phrase is used a number of times to lend emphasis to a statement or to a series of statements.

1. Noun Repetition

- a. He watched her for a moment, trying to command the *hatred*, the passionate vindictive *hatred*, which now welled up uncontrollably within him.

Somerset Maugham, The Merry-go-round

The repetition of HATRED stresses the fact that the hatred the man was trying to command was extremely hard to control because of its passionate vindictiveness.

- b. Now, instinct more than reason warned her that D.C. Guerrero was in *trouble* — more serious *trouble* than they had yet encountered.

Arthur Hailey, Airport

- c. Though in *questions* of war and peace Athens was reduced to a vassal of Sparta, in *questions* of art and literature, philosophy and science, the greatness of Athens continued.

Carlton J. H. Hayes, Parker Thomas and John W. Wayland, World History

Here the repetition of QUESTIONS is admirable. It helps to present a complete picture of Athens at that time: while a humble dependant in war and peace, Athens remained great in other respects.

2. Pronoun Repetition

- a. Let that be a warning to us not to ape any foreign country. Let us be content to trust *ourselves* and to be *ourselves*.

Stanley Baldwin, On England

Stanley Baldwin was an able statesman. He was Prime Minister of Britain from 1924 to 1929. He repeated the use of OURSELVES to show his strong desire that the British people should follow their own course in developing their country.

- b. *Everything* she says, *everything* she does, jars upon me so frightfully.

Somerset Maugham, The Merry-go-round

Repetition of the two pronouns EVERYTHING and SHE serves emphatic purpose; their omission would have weakened the effect.

- c. *All light, all eyes, all minds*, are magnetized to that one point, the small uncovered area which for the hour is the focus of existence.

Monica Dickens (describing a surgical operation)

- d. *Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every hillside, every valley, every clearing and wood*, is holy in the memory and experience of my people.

Chief Seattle, Speech Made on the Occasion of the Signing of the Port Elliot Treaty of 1855

The repeated use of EVERY three times exercises a great moral effect on the listener, thus reinforcing the speaker's determination that he refused, on behalf of his people, to yield an inch of the land.

- e. Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay *any* price, bear *any* burden, meet *any* hardship, support *any* friend, oppose *any* foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

John F. Kennedy, The Inaugural Address Delivered on January 20, 1961

The use of so many ANY's in 'close succession might have created a most dramatic effect on the American audience. Obviously, the writer of the speech aimed to strengthen and reinforce the determination on the part of the new Kennedy Administration to fulfil those assurances listed in the passage. No wonder some western commentators said that Kennedy's secretary seemed to have a better command of English than Eisenhower's.

3. Repetition of Adjectives Used Attributively

- a. He is as barbarous as Hitler ever was. He uses *vicious* lies, *vicious* torture, *vicious* means of war.

From an editorial in Vanguard

The two repetitions of VICIOUS in the rather short sentence captures and holds the reader's attention. You would think that the man referred to is up to anything vicious and is vice personified.

- b. Under serfdom, we serfs had no end of corvee, debts and floggings. Year in and year out, we found everything empty — *empty* homes, *empty* pockets, *empty* bowls and *empty* stomachs.

Instead of being long-winded, the repetition of EMPTY serves to present a sad, sombre picture of the hopeless state of serfs living under serfdom, You can't help your blood boiling with indignation as you read the fact.

4. Repetition of Adjectives Used Predicatively

- a. Whatever else he might be, one thing was certain: Lord Melbourne was always *human*, extremely *human* — too *human*, perhaps,

Lytton Strachey, Queen Victoria

- b. This be the verse you grave for me:

Here he lies where he longed to be;

Home is the sailor, *home* from sea,

And the hunter *home* from the hill.

Robert Louis Stevenson, Requiem

The above is the second stanza of the well-known poem *Requiem* by Stevenson, a natural poet and storyteller. It was written by the poet as an epitaph for himself. The repeated use of HOME in the last two short lines emphatically shows that after long years of illness, the poet faced death with a smile and found in it a home to return to, thus bringing out his brave, cheery and wholesome spirit.

5. Adverb Repetition

- a. It's never the wrong time to call on Toad. Early or late, he's *always* the same fellow — *always* good-tempered, *always* glad to see you, *always* sorry when you go.

Kenneth Grahame, The wind in the willows

The four ALWAYS' repeated in quick succession vividly bring out the commendable qualities of Toad: friendly, sociable, always trying to get along with everyone he knows.

- b. It's *far*, *far* too expensive.

Quirk, et al, A Grammar of Contemporary English

- c. The stamina and valour of our fighter pilots remained unconquerable and supreme. Thus Britain was saved. Well might I say in the House of Commons, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

Winston Churchill

During the Second World War, the Royal Air Force played a major part in defending Britain against Germany. The R.A.F. engaged the

main strength of the German Air Force and inflicted upon them losses of at least four to one. It is documented that large formations of German airplanes were, on several occasions, beaten back by one-quarter of their number of the Royal Air Force. Churchill intentionally repeated SO twice in the short direct speech to stress the fact that the skill and devotion of the Royal Air Force deserved the warmest gratitude of the British people.

- d. But since 1974, Skylab has been empty; it is no longer in use. This is because the space station is losing weight *quickly* — too *quickly*.

From a science report

6. Verb Repetition

- a. I *shivered* as though a cold wind ran through me; I *shivered* with fear.

Somerset Maugham, The Razor's Edge

- b. Terror reigns over the city. All through the night police cars patrol up and down, hunting down the marchers and rushing them to prison. All night long the beating and questioning goes on; the search goes on

Phillip Bonosky, Brother Bill McKie Building the Union at Ford

The verb phrase GOES ON is repeated to echo the foregoing description of terror reigning over the city, thus achieving emphasis.

- c. Nor do I think I am likely at the age of seventy or over to write anything of great value. Incentive *fails*, energy *fails*, invention *fails*.

Somerset Maugham, A Writer's notebook

Maugham gives three reasons why he thought it unlikely to write anything of great value at his old age. The three FAIL's repeated so closely show with emphasis that he took things like a philosopher and was resigned to the inevitable: the flowers of literary creation will die, do what one may.

7. Participial Repetition

- a. His life was *finished* now, *finished* in misery and utter despair.

Somerset Maugham, The Merry-go-round

- b. The great joy of life is that it is a task which is never done. Go on *learning* all your life. I am *learning* now, and I mean to go on *learning* if I live to be a hundred.

The key word LEARNING is repeated twice by the writer to impress the reader with his sensible idea that learning is a great joy of life and that one is never too old to learn.

8. Infinitive Repetition

- a. Warren believed in applauding politely *to reward* effort, generously *to reward* competence, and frenetically *to reward* genius.

Hans P. Guth, *Words and Ideas*

- b. Bound *to succeed*, and *to succeed* easily, he was gifted with so fine a nature that *success* became him.

Lytton Strachey, *Queen Victoria*

The close repetition of the infinitive TO SUCCEED coupled with its repeated variation SUCCESS brings out most effectively the writer's point that the person in question was born to succeed in life because of his exceptionally fine nature.

9. Numeral Repetition

- a. *Thousands* upon *thousands* of people in South Africa are rising against their oppressors.
- b. We are planting forest belts on *millions* and *millions* of acres.
- c. Seven years, my Lord, have now passed since I waited in your outward rooms, or was repulsed from your door; during which time I have been pushing on my work through difficulties, of which it is useless to complain, and have brought it, at last, to the verge of publication without *one* act of assistance, *one* word of encouragement, or *one* smile of favor. Such treatment I did not expect, for I never had a Patron before.

Samual Johnson, *Letter to Lord Chesterfield*

The system of patronage was prevalent in England in Johnson's time. Since the reading public was small, the way a man could obtain any real financial return from writing was by having a patron among the wealthy nobility. It was understood that the author would dedicate his work to the patron, who in return saw to the author's financial welfare. When the tremendous undertaking of compiling a dictionary was first contemplated, Johnson requested the support of Lord Chesterfield, the most "elegant" gentleman of his day. But Chesterfield merely looked with unconcern when Johnson was struggling hard in the water and encumbered him with help when he reached ground by writing two papers in *The World*, a famous magazine at that time, to

recommend Johnson's Dictionary in the hope that the Dictionary would be dedicated to him. The result is clearly told in the paragraph quoted above. The repeated use of ONE forcefully shows Johnson's native independence of spirit and is said to have hereby sounded the death knell of the whole patronage system.

10. Prepositional Repetition

A miracle of deliverance, achieved *by* value, *by* perseverance, *by* perfect discipline, *by* faultless service, *by* resource, *by* skill, *by* unconquerable fidelity, is manifest to us all. The enemy was hurled back *by* the retreating British and French troops.

Winston Churchill, "Dunkirk,"
Blood, Sweat, and Tears

The above statement is made exceedingly forceful by repeating the preposition BY a good number of times.

11. Conjunction Repetition

- a. I had never heard such a captivating talker. He was grave *when* the subject needed gravity, humorous *when* there was occasion for it.

Somerset Maugham, *A Writer's Notebook*

- b. He was never put out by Strickland's rudeness; *if* it was merely sullen, he appeared not to notice it; *if* it was aggressive, he only chuckled.

Somerset Maugham, *The Moon and Sixpence*

The same conjunction is repeated to help the reader follow the continuity of thought from sentence to sentence because clauses (except noun clauses), when introduced by the same conjunction, either support or indirectly repeat the meaning of the topic sentence as shown in each of the above two examples. Conjunction repetition is effective for emphasis as well as for rhythm.

12. Phrasal Repetition

But *one hundred years later*, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free. *One hundred years later*, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. *One hundred years later*, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. *One hundred years later*, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we have come

here today to dramatize an appalling condition.

Martin Luther King, Jr., I Have a Dream

The phrase ONE HUNDRED YEARS LATER is repeated a good number of times by Dr. King to emphasize his strong protest against segregation and other kinds of social injustice suffered for so many years by the Negro in American society.

13. Clause Repetition

- a. *My heart's in the Highlands*, my heart is not here;

My heart's in the Highlands, achasing the deer;

Achasing the wild deer, and following the roe,

My heart's in the Highlands wherever I go.

Robert Burns, My Hearts' in the Highlands

The greatest song writer in British literature, Burns was good at combining lilting melody with human emotions in varied manifestations. The above quotation is the second stanza of the poem in which Burns repeats the thematic sentence twice to stress his deep love for the Highlands, his birthplace.

- b. I had just been brought face to face with something I had either forgotten or completely ignored for more than six exciting years — my black skin. *It had not mattered* when I volunteered for aircrew service in 1940; *it had not mattered* during the period of flying training or when I received my wings and was posted to a squadron; *it had not mattered* in the hectic uncertainties of operational flying, of living and loving from day to day, brothered to men who like myself had no tomorrow and could not afford to fritter away today on the absurdities of prejudice; *it had not mattered* when, uniformed and winged, I visited theatres and dance-halls, pubs and private houses.

E. R. Braithwaite, To Sir With Love

Braithwaite, the author of the notable autobiography *To Sir With Love*, is a Negro, born in British Guiana. He had come to England for post-graduate training in engineering and when the Second World War broke out, he volunteered for service in the Royal Air Force. The above is quoted from the passage describing his bitter experience on demobilization at the end of the war. While he was an airman in flying kit, defying death on His Majesty's business, he was, in spite

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国税则分类和细目，善于发现间隙，加以利用，就能扩大出口。

另外，还有不少非限额商品可以积极组织出口，例如共同体对丝麻制品不受限制，加拿大配额品种仅 28 类，美国仅六类商品，其余不受限制，我们都可想方设法扩大出口。

3. 要加强对客户的管理。配额品种一般是供不应求的商品，对进口商来说，利润是有保障的。因此，我们可以通过发放出口许可证，签发产地证和装船证书加以控制。在对外交易中，不能简单地不分对象，先来先卖，而应有计划有选择地将这些配额品种卖给代理商、经销商或重点客户，以鼓励他们的积极性并要他们带动“篮子品种”和无限额的品种出口。同时，通过优先供应配额品种，可要求客户及时地向我提供出口国配额变动情况，以便我采取相应的对策。

对客户要整顿、使用和培养，尤其是服装品种繁什，客户多而分散，要不断整顿，不断培养，逐渐发展高档品种客户。

4. 为了履行对外缔结的协定义务，管理好配额品种的出口，各业务部门必须要有一个精确的统计资料。业务部门按时上报的配额使用情况，数字一定要正确。业务部门内部也要加强统计和联系，保证成交出运数不超过配额数。

最近，据西方经济学家预测，1981 年资本主义世界经济仍将不会有一个好的年头。今后资本主义国家争夺市场的斗争将会日益加剧，随之而采取进口配额制的保护主义措施也将会不断加强。

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of his dark skin, smiled at, encouraged and welcomed by grateful civilians in bars or on the street. Yet, no place cared to employ him when he was demobilized after the war, even though he had a science degree and varied experience in engineering technology — just because of his dark skin! In the above quotation, Braithwaite repeats the clause IT HAD NOT MATTERED three times to lash out at the capricious changes in the mood of British society and to show his rage against the racial discrimination in Britain.

14. Repetition of Grammatical Pattern

This kind of repetition is often applied to epigrammatic writing and makes what is written very suitable for reading aloud. Here is an example to illustrate the point:

The air *must be* pure
if we are to breathe;
the soil *must be* arable
if we are to eat;
the water *must be* clean
if we are to drink.

Hans P. Gueh, *Words and Ideas*
(To be continued)